

FROM THE CHAIR / Spring 2026

Dear colleagues, friends, and alumni,

I am pleased to share this Spring 2026 newsletter. Our faculty and students continue to lead at the frontiers of discovery in numerous areas, and their work reflects both deep scientific excellence and a strong commitment to real-world impact. We are also proud of the many honors received across the department. Together, these achievements highlight the growing visibility and influence of Northwestern Mechanical Engineering.

This year also marks an important leadership transition. I am delighted that Professor **Sinan Keten** has been **named the next chair** of the department, effective Sept. 1. Having worked closely with Sinan in both administrative and research settings, I am confident his vision and leadership will guide the department successfully to its next level of prominence.

As I reflect on my six years as chair, beginning at the onset of the pandemic, I am deeply grateful for the support of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and advisory board. Despite unprecedented challenges, the department has demonstrated remarkable resilience, with significant growth in both research activity and student enrollment. It has been an honor to serve this exceptional community.

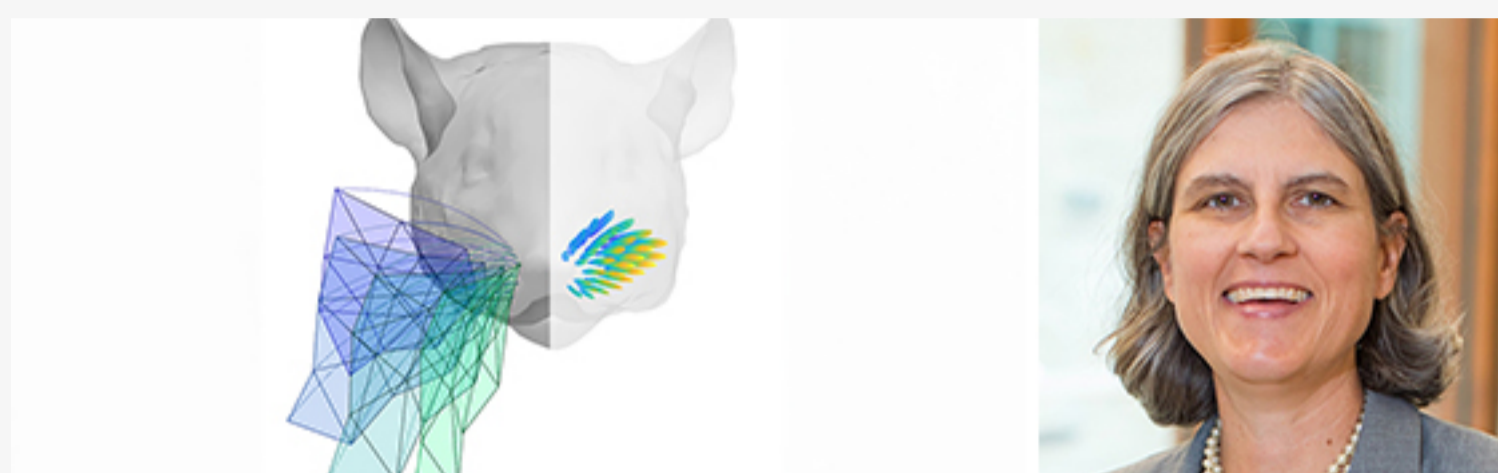


Wei Chen
Wilson-Cook Professor in Engineering Design
Professor and Chair
Department of Mechanical Engineering
McCormick School of Engineering



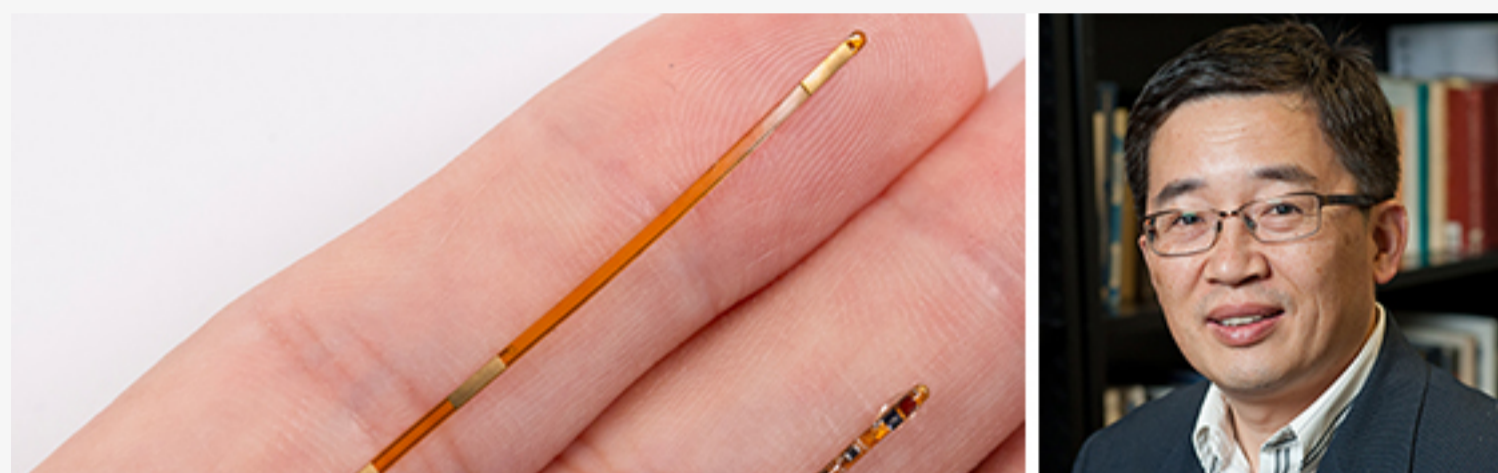
Evolved Robots Are Born to Run and Refuse to Die

Developed by Professor **Sam Kriegman**, AI-designed metamachines can run in the wild, recover from damage, and transform into new shapes.



How Geometry Shapes Body Movements When Dozens of Muscles Act Together

Professor **Mitra Hartmann** and her team showed that whisker and muscle anatomy alone can produce coordinated motion, reducing the need for complex neural control.



First-of-Its-Kind Probe Monitors Fetal Health in Utero During Surgery

The flexible, hair-like device developed by Professor **Yonggang Huang** safely enters the uterus for continuous, real-time monitoring.



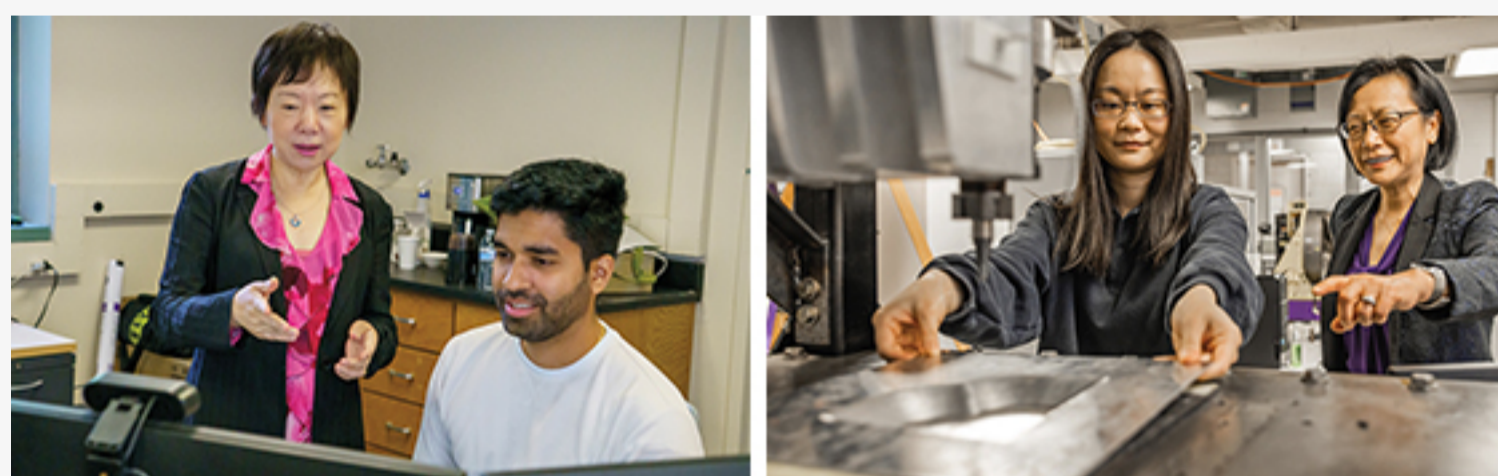
Wood Burning in Homes Drives Dangerous Air Pollution in Winter

Research from undergraduate student **Kyan Shlipak** showed that thousands of US deaths per year are linked to particulate matter from wood smoke.



3D-Printed Scaffolds for New Blood Vessels

Professor **Cheng Sun** contributed to work that points to a new approach for heart bypass grafts.



From Our Magazine: From Atoms to Innovation

Northwestern Engineering researchers, including Professors **Wei Chen** and **Jian Cao**, are leading the way in applying predictive, data-driven methods to reshape materials design and manufacturing.

Department News

Professor **Horacio Espinosa** was **honored twice**, winning the Zdeněk P. Bažant Medal for his contributions to the mechanics of failure and damage, and the Horace Mann Medal that honors Brown University graduate school alumni.

Professor **Sinan Keten** **won the ASME 2026 Zdeněk P. Bažant Medal**, which was established in 2022 to recognize significant contributions to the field of mechanics through research, practice, teaching, and outstanding leadership.

Professor **Ryan Truby** **received a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Director's Fellowship**, which is presented to selected DARPA Young Faculty Awardees.

Mohammed Alamin, Gautham Anne, Amanda Diao, and Anjana Radha **joined the Apple Next-Gen Innovators Mentorship Program**, a highly selective initiative designed to inspire and prepare the next generation of engineers through personalized mentorship and immersive learning experiences.

Ohm Vyas (MS '25) was **named to Chicago Inno's 2025 "Under 25" list**, which recognizes young entrepreneurs and innovators making an impact across the Chicago region.

PhD student **Gwen Liu** was awarded a US Department of Defense National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship.

Seven mechanical engineering students received fellowships from the National Science Foundation. PhD students **Gabrielle Leinbach** (advised by Sinan Keten), **Anna Lutz** (advised by Junsoo Kim), **Aravind Rao Ramaswami** (advised by Kevin Lynch), and **Anunth Rao Ramaswami** (advised by Kevin Lynch) earned NSF Graduate Research fellowships, as did undergraduates **Lynna Deng** (advised by MIT's Nathan Wei), **Kyan Shlipak** (advised by MIT's Jesse Kroll), and **Helena Young** (advised by Todd Murphey).

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Getting AI to Think with You, Not for You

In the Fall 2025 issue of *Northwestern Engineering* magazine, Professor Liz Gerber shared five tips on how to use AI in idea generation.